Review: Lode Runner: The Legend Returns

by Kevin M. Savetz

IMG Rating: 1.1.1.1

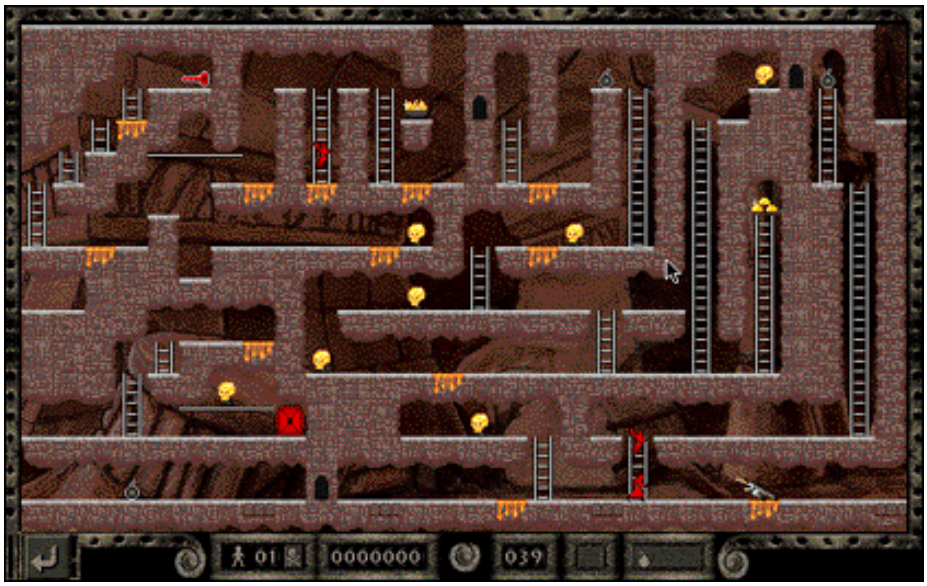
Type	Action/Arcade
Publisher	Sierra Online (800/326-6654)
Retail Price	$59.95
Street Price	$41.00
Requires	System 6.0.7 or later, 13" monitor with 16 or 256 colors/greys, hard drive, 25 MHz 030 or faster recommended.
Protection	None

Archival reconstruction from the original Inside Mac Games electronic magazine. Text, styling cues, and artwork were extracted from the original Macintosh resources; the flowing PDF layout is new. Source: Inside Mac Games, November 1994.

It was the one of the first games I bought for my Atari 800. It was pretty much the only game my Apple][-owning buddies ever played on their flickery green monitors. It was simple, frustrating and (above all) addictive. It was Lode Runner, and it was a unique twist on the run-and-shoot genre of computer games. A decade or so later, Lode Runner is back.

Except for the splendid graphics, musical interludes and sound effects, and the addition of a few new game elements, Lode Runner - the Legend Returns is the same old game.

What? You Never Played It? If you missed Lode Runner the first time around, here's the gist: you control a little humanoid in his attempt to collect every bit of gold from each of 150 levels. Each level features a group of baddies, who are always in pursuit in a mindless effort to kill you dead. Your little guy can run, climb ladders, and do a hand-over-hand move on overhead bars. He can also fall — heights don't frighten him, and he'll take plummet from the top your monitor to the bottom, in stride.



Original artwork embedded with this review.

He's got a blaster, which he doesn't use the sear holes in the baddies. Instead, he can use it to drill holes in the ground. If a baddie falls in one of the holes, he'll get stuck there for a while. The hole will then magically fill itself again, killing the baddie. (Or, the baddie might crawl out of the hole, an interesting twist from the original Lode Runner game.) The baddies are pretty stupid, but there are enough of them to keep you on the run.

That's pretty much the game: run and dig, grab the loot, get out. What makes the game interesting is that (after the first few levels), it just ain't so easy. Each level is a puzzle, requiring a combination of careful planning and exquisite timing to complete. Problems you'll have to deal with: three or four baddies protecting that last gold bar; a bag of gold buried under ten layers of earth (and no apparent way out even if you get down there); and annoying combinations of blastable and impenetrable surfaces.

Old-Timers. Old-time Lode Runners will find a few new twists, including color-coded keys and corresponding doors (you gotta get the key before you can go through the door), a sticky muck that slows you down, fancy new tools for nuking yourself and your enemies, and (of course) a whole bunch of new puzzles. Some levels also feature bombs, which you can use to blow up large sections of the playfield.

If you decide that you can't make it though a level, Lode Runner will let you skip it. Or, if you need more lives, the game will oblige. If you use either of these cheats, the game will reset your score at the start of every level rather than keeping a cumulative tab. 150 levels will keep you busy for a long time, but you may, after a while, find the game play monotonous.

The graphics are pulchritudinous (beautiful), and the music and sound effects are dandy. A variety of colorful backgrounds and flavorful music helps keep the game interesting. As you might expect, the price you pay for graphics and sound is hard disk space, and Lode Runner is a disk space glutton: the full install uses 11 megabytes. The 256-color only version uses 9. The "minimal" PowerBook installation, with 16-color graphics and no music or sound effects, eats 4.3 megs. That's a lot of space for a game that plays almost exactly like the version that used to fit on one low-density Atari diskette.

The game features a simultaneous two-player mode, in which the players work cooperatively to solve puzzles and competitively for the gold. There's also a level editor, for those of us who like to create worlds of our own.

Lode Runner is almost a non-violent game that I would let my kids (if I had any kids) play, except for one sticky point: when the baddies get you (and they will get you) the animation you see and hear is just a little too icky. I don't really want to see the Little Man get dismembered, thank you very much. At least the death scene is short.

He’s Back! All in all, Lode Runner - the Legend Returns is an interesting game, especially for puzzle-solving crowd. If you loved it in 1985, you’ll adore it today. If the puzzles frustrated you to death before, well, they’re even worse.

Pros

- A whole lode of fun (groan!)
- 150 challenging levels
- Level editor included
- Two-player mode

Cons

- Hard-disk hog
- Can be monotonous